

Alamut Castle

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Alamut (Persian: جبل الموت, meaning "eagle's nest") was a mountain fortress located in Alamut region in the South Caspian province of Daylam near the Rudbar region in Persia (Iran), approximately 100 km (60 mi) from present-day Tehran.^{[1] 23}

Between 1090 and 1256 AD, under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah, Alamut became the site of intense activity for the Shi'a Nizari Isma'is, functioning as the headquarters of their state, which was consisted a series of unconnected strategic strongholds scattered throughout Persia and Syria, surrounded by huge swaths of hostile territory (the Seljuq Empire). In 1256, Rukn al-Din Khwarizm surrendered the fortress to the invading Mongols, and its famous library holdings were destroyed. Sources on the history and thought of the Ismailis in this period are therefore lacking and the majority extant are written by their detractors. After the Mongol destruction, the castle was of only regional significance, passing through the hands of various local powers. Today, it lies in ruins, but because of its historical significance, it is being developed by the Iranian government as a tourist destination.

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Alamut <div>الموت</div>	
 <div>Alamut</div>	
General information	
Type	Castle
Location	Alamut region, Qazvin Province of Iran
Town or city	Moslem Kalayeh
Country	 Iran
Coordinates	36°26′40.63″N 50°35′9.58″E﻿ / ﻿
Completed	602
Destroyed	1256

Origins

The origins of the Alamut fortress can be traced back to the Justanid ruler, Vahsadan, who, during a hunting trip, witnessed a soaring eagle perch down high on a rock.^{[1] 27} Realizing the tactical advantage of the location, he chose the site for the construction of a fortress, which was called "ʾAlah ʾimū[kh]" likely meaning "Eagle's Teaching" or "Nest of Punishment".^{[2] 30}^{[3] 49} Alamut remained under Justanid control until the arrival of the Ismaili chief *da'ī* (missionary) Hasan-i Sabbah to the castle in 1090 AD, marking the start of the Alamut period in Ismaili history.

List of Nizārī Ismāʿīlī rulers at Alamut (1090–1256 AD)

Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Da is who ruled at Alamut

- Hasan-i Sabbah (حسن صباح) (1090–1124)
- Kiya Buzurg-Ummid (کیا بزرگ امید) (1124–1138)
- Muhammad ibn Kiya Buzurg-Ummid (محمد بزرگ امید) (1138–1162) Muhammad bin Kiya Buzurg Ummid (Turkish)

Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Concealed Imāms at Alamut

- Alī al-Hādī ibn Nizār ibn al-Mustansir billāh El-Hādī bin el-Nizār (Turkish)
- Al-Mōhtādī ibn al-Hādī (*Muhammad I*) El-Mōhtādī bin el-Hādī (Turkish)
- Al-Qahir ibn al-Mōhtādī bi-Qawāt ʾilā-Lāh / bi-Ahkāmīʾ-Lāh (*Hasan I*) El-Kahir ibn el-Mōhtādī bi-Kurvet ʾilā-Lāh / bi-Ahkāmīʾ-Lāh (Turkish)

Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Imāms who ruled at Alamut

- Imām Hasan 'Ala Dhikrihi al-Salam (*Hasan II*) (امام حسن علی نگر الدین) (1162–1166)
- Imām Nūr al-dīn Muhammad (*Muhammad II*) (نور دین محمد) (1166–1210) Nūr al-dīn Muhammad II (Turkish)
- Imām Jalāl al-Dīn Hasan (*Hasan III*) (امام جلال الدین حسن) (1210–1231)
- Imām 'Alī al-Dīn Muhammad (*Muhammad III*) (امام علی دین محمد) (1231–1255) 'Alī al-Dīn Muhammad III (Turkish)
- Imām Rukn al-Dīn Khwarshah (امام رکن الدین خوارشه) (1255–1256)

History

Following his expulsion from Egypt over his support for Nizar bin Mustansir, Hasan-i Sabbah found that his co-regionalists, the Ismailis, were scattered throughout Iran, with a strong presence in the northern and eastern regions, particularly in Daylam, Khorasan and Quhistan. The Ismailis and other occupied peoples of Iran held shared resentment for the ruling Seljuqs, who had divided the country's farmland into *iqṭāʿ* (fiefs) and levied heavy taxes upon the citizen living therein. The Seljuq *amirs* (independent rulers) usually held full jurisdiction and control over the districts they administered.^{[9] 126} Meanwhile, Persian artisans, craftsmen and lower classes grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Seljuq policies and heavy taxes.^{[9] 126} Hasan too, was appalled by the political and economic oppression imposed by the Sunni Seljuq ruling class on Shi'a Muslims living across Iran.^{[9] 126} It was in this context that he embarked on a resistance movement against the Seljuqs, beginning with the search for a secure site from which to launch his revolt.

The capture of Alamut

By 1090 AD, the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk had already given orders for Hasan's arrest and therefore Hasan was living in hiding in the northern town of Qazvin, approximately 60 km from the Alamut castle.^{[1] 23} There, he made plans for the capture of the fortress, which was surrounded by a fertile valley whose inhabitants were mainly fellow Shi'i Muslims, the support of whom Hasan could easily gather for the revolt against the Seljuqs. The castle had never before been captured by military means and thus Hasan planned meticulously.^{[1] 23} Meanwhile, he dispatched his reliable supporters to the Alamut valley to begin settlements around the castle.

In the summer of 1090 AD, Hasan set out from Qazvin towards Alamut on a mountainous route through Andej. He remained at Andej disguised as a schoolteacher named Dakhkoda until he was certain that a number of his supporters had settled directly below the castle in the village of Gazokhan or had gained employment at the fortress itself.^{[1] 23} Still in disguise, Hasan made his way into the fortress, earning the trust and friendship of many of its soldiers. Careful not to attract the attention of the castle's *Zaydi* 'Alid lord, Mahdi, Hasan began to attract prominent figures at Alamut to his mission. It has even been suggested that Mahdi's own deputy was a secret supporter of Hasan, waiting to demonstrate his loyalty on the day that Hasan would ultimately take the castle.^{[1] 23}

Earlier in the summer, Mahdi visited Qazvin, where he received strict orders from Nizam al-Mulk to find and arrest Hasan who was said to be hiding in the province of Daylamen. Upon his return to the Alamut fortress, Mahdi noticed several new servants and guards employed there. His deputy explained that ʿIlmshah had taken many of the castle's workers and it was fortunate that other labourers were found from the neighbouring villages. Worried about the associations of these workers, Mahdi ordered his deputy to arrest anyone with connections to the Ismailis.^{[1] 22}

Mahdi's suspicions were confirmed when Hasan finally approached the lord of the fortress, revealing his true identity and declared that the castle now belonged to him. Immediately, Mahdi called upon the guards to arrest and remove Hasan from the castle, only to find them prepared to follow Hasan's every command. Astounded, he realized he had been tricked and was allowed to exit the castle freely.^{[1] 23} Before leaving however, Mahdi was given a draft of 3000 gold dinars as payment for the fortress, payable by a Seljuq officer in service to the Ismaili cause named Ra'is Mu'azzilr who honoured the payment in full.^{[1] 23} The Alamut fortress was captured from Mahdi and therefore from Seljuq control by Hasan and his supporters without resorting to any violence.^{[1] 24}

Construction and intellectual development



Scaffolding by Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization.

With Alamut now in his possession, Hasan swiftly embarked on a complete re-fortification of the complex. By enhancing the walls and structure of a series of storage facilities, the fortress was to act as a self-sustaining stronghold during major confrontations. The perimeter of the rooms were lined with limestone, so as to preserve provisions to be used in times of crisis. Indeed, when the Mongols invaded the fortress, Juwayni was astonished to see stored countless supplies in perfect condition to withstand a possible siege.^{[1] 27} Recent work by Iranian archeologists at the northern gate of the fortress revealed two interconnected cellars, likely used as private spaces or for food storage.^[7]

Next, Hasan took on the task of irrigating the surrounding villages of the Alamut valley. The land at valley's floor was arable land, allowing for the cultivation of dry crops including barley, wheat and rice. In order to make available the maximum amount of cultivable land, the ground was terraced under Hasan's direction.^{[1] 27} The sloping valley was broken up into step-like platforms upon which abundant food could be cultivated. In times of need the surrounding villages were well equipped to furnish the castle with ample supplies.

The construction of Alamut's famous library likely occurred after Hasan's fortification of the castle and its surrounding valley. With its astronomical instruments and rare collection of works, the library attracted scholars and scientists of a variety of religious persuasions from around the world who visited it for many months at a time, hosted by the Ismailis.^{[1] 27} By and large the writings of the Persian Ismailis, both scientific and doctrinal, did not survive beyond the Alamut period. In addition to the rich literature they had already produced in Arabic, the relocation of the Ismaili center to Iran now prompted a surge in Persian Ismaili literature.^{[9] 121} The bulk of Nizari writing produced in this period, however, was lost or destroyed during the Mongol invasions. While the majority of Alamut's theological works on Ismailism were lost during the library's destruction, a few significant writings were preserved including the major anonymous work of 1199 AD entitled *Ḥaḡf Bāb-i Bāb-i Seyyidhī* and a number of treatises by Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

One of the earliest losses of the library came during the early years of the Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan's leadership at Alamut. In keeping with his principles of bridging the gaping relations between the Persian Ismailis and the broader Sunni world, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan invited a number of religious scholars from the towns of Qazvin to visit the castle's library and burn any books they deemed heretical.^{[9] 121} However, it was not until under the direction of the Mongol ruler, Hulegu Khan, when the Mongols ascended to the fortress in December 1256 AD, that the Alamut library was lost. With the permission of Hulegu, Juwayni explored the library and selected a few works he deemed worthy of salvaging, before the remainder was set aflame. His choice items included copies of the Qur'an, a number of astronomical instruments and treatises, and a number of Ismaili works. An anti-Ismaili, Ata-Malik Juvayni's personal leanings were the sole measure of heretical content of the library's doctrinal works.^{[1] 46} Thus, some of the richest treatises regarding the tenets of Ismaili faith were lost with his destruction of the library. From his tour and survey of the castle, Juwayni also comd a description of al-Din's narrative and recounted in the *Ḥaḡf Bāb-i Abi Ishāq*, an Ismaili book of the 15th century AD. However, these are either based on Juwayni, or don't go into great detail.^{[10] 140} No contemporary Ismaili account of the events has survived, and it is likely that scholars will never know the exact details of this time.

Concealment and emergence: Imamat at Alamut

With the death of Hasan-i Sabbah in 1124 AD, the Alamut fortress was now in the command of the *da'ī* Kiya Buzurg Ummid, under whose direction Ismaili-Seljuq relations improved.^{[1] 34} However, this was not without a test of the strength of Buzurg Ummid's command, and consequently the Seljuqs began an offensive in 1126 AD on the Ismaili strongholds of Rudbar and Quhistan. Only after these assaults failed did the Seljuq sultan Sanjar concede to recognise the independence of the Ismaili territories.^{[1] 35} Three days before his death, Kiya Buzurg-Ummid designated his son Muhammad ibn Kiya' to lead the community in the name of the Ismaili Imam.

Muhammad ibn Kiya Buzurg

Accordingly, Muhammad succeeded Kiya Buzurg Ummid in 1138 AD. Though they expected some resistance to his rule, the fragmented Seljuqs were met with continued solidarity amongst the Ismailis, who remained unified under Muhammad's command.^{[9] 135} The early part of Muhammad's rule saw a continued low level of conflict, enabling the Nizaris to acquire and construct a number of fortresses in the Qumis and Rudbar regions, including the castles of Sa'ad-akuh, Muharak-akuh, and Firuz-kuh.^{[9] 383} Muhammad designated his son Hasan, born in 1126 AD, to lead the community in the name of the Imam. Hasan was well trained in Ismaili doctrine and *su'wī* (esoteric interpretation).

Imam Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salam

Taken by illness in 1162 AD, Muhammad was succeeded by Hasan, who was then about thirty-five years of age.^{[9] 25} Only two years after his accession, the Imam Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salam, apparently conducted a ceremony known as *qiyama* (resurrection) at the grounds of the castle of Alamut, whereby the Imam himself once again become visible to his community of followers in and outside of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state. Given Juwayn's polemical aims, and the fact that he burned the Ismāʿīlī libraries which may have offered much more reliable testimony about the history, scholars have been dubious about his narrative but are forced to rely on it given the absence of alternative sources. Fortunately, descriptions of this time also are preserved in Rashid al-Din's narrative and recounted in the *Ḥaḡf Bāb-i Abi Ishāq*, an Ismaili book of the 15th century AD. However, these are either based on Juwayni, or don't go into great detail.^{[10] 140} No contemporary Ismaili account of the events has survived, and it is likely that scholars will never know the exact details of this time.

The Imam Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salam died only a year and a half after the declaration of the *qiyama*. According to Juwayni, he was stabbed in the Ismaili castle of Lambasar by his brother in law, Hasan Namwaz.

Ismaili version of the Alamut history

What little we know about the Imamate at Alamut is narrated to us by one of the greatest detractors of the Ismailis, Juwayni. According to the Ismaili version of the events, in the year following the death of the Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir, a *quadi* (judge) by the name of Sa' id travelled from Egypt to Alamut, taking with him Imam Nūr's youngest son, who was known as al-Hadi.^[9]^[70] Imam Hadi apparently lived in concealment in the Alamut valley, under the protection of Hasan- i Sabbah, then the chief *da' i* of the Nizari Ismaili state. Following him were Imam Mulhadi and Imam Qutub, also living in concealment from the general population, but in touch with the highest-ranking members of the Ismaili hierarchy (yusufid). These living and visible proofs of the existence of the concealed Imams are known in Ismaili calli doctrine as *hujjat* (proof). The period of the Imam's concealment was marked by central direction from the chief *da' i* at the Alamut fortress across the Nizari Ismaili state. With the emergence of Imam Hasan 'ala dhikri al-salam however, the period of concealment (*suri*) was now complete.

Imam Nūr al-Din Muhammad

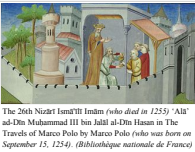
Succeeding Hasan 'ala dhikri al-salam in 1166, was the Imam Nūr al-Din Muhammad II, who, like his father and the imams of the pre-Alamut period, openly declared himself to his followers. Under the forty-year rule of the Imam Nur al-Din Muhammad, the doctrine of Imamate was further developed and, consistent with the tradition of Shi' i Islam, the figure of the Imam was accorded greater importance.

Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan

Within Persia, the Nizaris of the qiyama period largely disregarded their former political endeavours and became considerably isolated from the surrounding Sunni world. The death of Muhammad II however, ushered in a new era for the Nizaris, under the direction of the next Imam Jalal al-din Hasan. Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan invited Sunni scholars and jurists from across Khurasan and Iraq to visit Alamut, and even invited them to inspect the library and remove any books they found to be objectionable.^[9]^[405] During his lifetime, the Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan maintained friendly relations with the ' Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir. An alliance with the caliph of Baghdad meant greater resources for the self-defence of not only the Nizari Ismaili state, but also the broader Muslim world.^[9]^[29]

Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad

After his death in 1221, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan was succeeded by his son 'Ala al-Din Muhammad. Ascending to the throne at only nine years of age, Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad continued his father's policy of maintaining close relations with the Abbasid caliph.^[6]^[406] Under the leadership of Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, the need for an Imam to constantly guide the community according to the demands of the times was emphasized. Intellectual life and scholarship flourished under the rule of Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad. The Nizari libraries were invigorated with scholars from across Asia, fleeing from the invading Mongols.^[9]^[417] Among these intellectuals, some, including Nasir al-Din Tusi, were responsible for important contributions to Ismaili thought towards the end of the Alamut period. Having written on the topics of astronomy, philosophy, and theology, Tusi's notable contributions to Ismaili thought include *Rawdat al-Jalil* (Paradise of Submission), which he composed with Hasan- i Mahmud Kathib, and *Sayr va Salsal* (The Journey), his spiritual autobiography. Following his two major ethical works, al-Tusi studied under the patronage of the Ismaili Imam at the Alamut library until it capitulated to the Mongols in 1256.



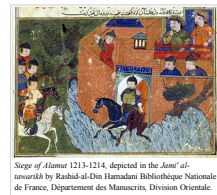
Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshab

By the time of Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad's murder in 1255, the Mongols had already attacked a number of the Ismaili strongholds in Qhistan. Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad was succeeded by his eldest son Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshab who engaged in a long series of negotiations with invading Mongols, and under whose leadership, the Alamut castle was surrendered to the Mongols.^[1]

The Mongol invasion and collapse of the Nizari Ismaili state

The expansion of Mongol power across Western Asia depended upon the conquest of the Islamic lands, the complete seizure of which would be impossible without dismantling the ancient Nizari Ismaili state.^[1]^[77] Consisting of over fifty strongholds unified under the central power of the Imam, the Nizaris represented a significant obstruction to the Mongol undertaking. The task of successively destroying these castles was assigned to Hulegu, under the direction of his brother, the Great Khan Möngke. Only after their destruction could the invading Mongols proceed to remove the Abbasid caliph from Baghdad and advance their conquest westward.

Before Hulegu set forth toward Persia, the threat to the Muslim world posed by the swelling Mongol force was perceived by the Ismaili Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, who in 1238 joined the Abbasid caliph, al-Mustansir, in appealing to the European monarchs of England and France to coalesce in a *Christian-Muslim Alliance* against the Mongols.^[1]^[77] Although the European rulers did not accept this proposal, the Ismaili Imam partnered again with the Sunni caliph in 1246 AD when the two journeyed to the enthronement of the Great Khan Güyük in Mongolia.^[1]^[77] Their joint expressions of peace were not acknowledged by the Mongol lord and shortly after in 1252 AD, the Mongols arrived in Qhistan.



The first Mongol attack on the Ismailis came in April 1253 AD, when many of the Qhistan fortresses were lost to the Christian Mongol general Ket-Buqa. By May, the Mongol troops had proceeded to the fortress of Girdkuh where Ismaili forces held ground for several months. In December, a cholera outbreak within the castle weakened the Ismaili defences. Reinforcements quickly arrived from the neighbouring Alamut fortress and thwarted the attacking Mongols, killing several hundred of Ket-Buqa's troops.^[1]^[78] The castle was saved but the subsequent Mongol assaults on the towns of Tun and Tus resulted in massacres. Across Khurasan the Mongols imposed tyrannical laws and were responsible for the mass displacement of the province's population.^[1]^[78]

After the massacres at Tun in 1256 AD, Hulegu became directly involved in the Mongol campaign to eliminate the Ismaili centres of power. From a lavish tent erected for him at Tus, Hulegu summoned the Ismaili governor at Qhistan, Nasir al-Din Multasham and demanded the surrender of all fortresses in his province. Nasir al-Din explained that submission could only come at the Imam's orders and that he, as governor, was powerless to seek the Ismailis' compliance.^[10]^[266]

Meanwhile, Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, who had been murdered, was succeeded by his son Rukn al-Din in 1255 AD. In 1256 AD, Rukn al-Din commenced a series of gestures demonstrating his submission to the Mongols. In a show of his compliance and at the demand of Hulegu, Rukn al-Din began the dismantling process at Alamut, Maymudiz and Lamasar, removing towers and battlements.^[10]^[267]

One means of delaying his seizure of the castles and on November 8, 1256, the Mongol troops quickly encircled the Maymudiz fortress and residence of the Imam. After four days of preliminary bombardment with significant casualties for both sides, the Mongols assembled their mangonels around the castle in preparation for a direct siege. There was still no snow on the ground and the attacks proceeded, forcing Rukn al-Din to declare his surrender in exchange for his and his family's safe passage.^[1]^[279] A *yur/high* (decree) was drafted and taken to the Imam by Juwayni. After another bombardment, Rukn al-Din descended from Maymudiz on the 19th day of November.

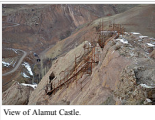
In the hands of Hulegu, Rukn al-Din was forced to send the message of surrender to all the castles in the Alamut valley. At the Alamut fortress, the Mongol Prince Balaghai led his troops to the base of the castle, calling for the surrender of the commander of Alamut, Muqaddam al-Din. It was decreed that should he surrender and pledge his allegiance to the Great Khan within one day, the lives of those at Alamut would be spared. Maymudiz was reluctant and wondered if the Imam's message of surrender was an actually act of duress.^[1]^[279] In obedience to the Imam, Muqaddam and his men descended from the fortress, and the Mongol army entered Alamut and began its demolition.^[1]^[79]

Compared with Maymudiz, the Alamut fortress was far better fortified and could have long withstood the assaults of the Mongol army. However, the castle was relatively small in size and was easily surrounded by the Mongols. Still, the most significant factor in determining the defeat of the Ismailis at Alamut was the command by the Imam for the surrender of the castles in the valley. Many of the other fortresses had already complied, therefore not only would Muqaddam's resistance have resulted in a direct battle for the castle, but the explicit violation of the instructions of the Imam, which would impact significantly on the Ismaili commander's oath of total obedience to the Imam.^[1]^[30]

The conquest of the Ismaili castles was critical to the Mongol's political and territorial expansion westward. However, it was depicted by Juwayni as a "matter of divine punishment upon the heretics [at] the nest of satan".^[13]^[81] Juwayni's depiction of the fall of the Nizari Ismaili state reveals the religious leanings of the anti-Ismaili historian. When Rukn al-Din arrived in Mongolia with promises to persuade the prevailing Ismaili fortresses to surrender, the Great Khan Möngke no longer believed the Imam to be of use. En route back to his homeland, Rukn al-Din was put to death. In his description of this, Juwayni concludes that the Imam's murder cleansed "the world which had been polluted by their evil".^[1]^[83] Subsequently in Qhistan, the Ismailis were called by thousands to attend large gatherings, where they were massacred. While some escaped to neighbouring regions, the Ismailis who perished in the massacres following the capture of the Ismaili garrisons numbered nearly 100,000.^[1]^[83]

Defence and military tactics

The natural geographical features of the valley surrounding Alamut largely secured the castle's defence. Positioned atop a narrow rock base approximately 180 m above ground level, the fortress could not be taken by direct military force.^[1]^[27] To the east, the Alamut valley is bordered by a mountainous range called Alamkub (*The Terrace of Solomon*) between which the Alamut River flows. The valley's western entrance is a narrow one, shielded by cliffs over 350 m high. Known as the Shirkub, the gorge sits at the intersection of three rivers: the Talskan, Shahrud and Alamut River. For much of the year, the raging waters of the river made this entrance nearly inaccessible. Qazvin, the closest town to the valley by land can only be reached by an underdeveloped mule track upon which an enemy's presence could easily be detected given the dust clouds arising from their passage.^[1]^[27]



The military approach of the Nizari Ismaili state was largely a defensive one, with strategically chosen sites that appeared to avoid confrontation wherever possible without the loss of life.^[1]^[28] But the defining characteristic of the Nizari Ismaili state was that it was scattered geographically throughout Persia and Syria. The Alamut castle therefore was only one of a nexus of strongholds where Ismailis could retreat to when necessary. West of Alamut in the Shahrud Valley, the major fortress of Lamasar served as each example of such a retreat. In the context of their political uprising, the various spaces of Ismaili military presence took on the name *dar al-hijra* (place of refuge). The notion of the *dar al-hijra* originates from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, who fled with his supporters from intense persecution to safe haven in *Yathrib*.^[10]^[79] In this way, the Fatimids found their *dar al-hijra* in North Africa. Likewise during the revolt against the Seljuqs, several fortresses served as spaces of refuge for the Ismailis.



In pursuit of their religious and political goals, the Ismailis adopted various military strategies popular in the Middle Ages. One such method was that of assassination, the selective elimination of prominent rival figures. The murders of political adversaries were usually carried out in public spaces, creating resounding intimidation for other possible enemies.^[6]^[12] Throughout history, many groups have resorted to assassination as a means of achieving political ends. In the Ismaili context, these assignments were performed by *fidai* 's (devotees) of the Ismaili mission. They were unique in that civilians were never targeted. The assassinations were against those whose elimination would most greatly reduce aggression against the Ismailis and, in particular, against those who had perpetrated massacres against the community.^[1]^[84] A single assassination was usually employed in favour of widespread bloodshed resultant from factional combat. The first instance of assassination in the effort to establish an Nizari Ismaili state in Persia is widely considered to be the murder of Seljuq vizier, Nizam al-Mulk.^[1]^[29] Carried out by a man dressed as a Sufi whose identity remains unclear, the vizier's murder in a Seljuq court is distinctive of exactly the type of visibility for which missions of the

fidai 's have been significantly exaggerated.^[1]^[29] While the Seljuqs and Crusaders both employed assassination as a military means of disposing of factional enemies, during the Alamut period almost any murder of political significance in the Islamic lands was attributed to the Ismailis.^[6]^[29]

Legend and folklore

During the medieval period, Western scholarship on the Ismailis contributed to the popular view of the community as a radical sect of assassins, believed to be trained for the precise murder of their adversaries. By the 14th century AD, European scholarship on the topic had not advanced much beyond the work and tales from the Crusaders.^[6]^[14] The origins of the word forgotten, across Europe the term Assassin had taken the meaning of "professional murderer".^[6]^[14] In 1603 the first Western publication on the topic of the Assassins was authored by a court official for King Henry IV and was mainly based on the narratives of Marco Polo (1254–1324) from his visits to the Near East. While he assembled the accounts of many Western travelers, the author failed to explain the etymology of the term Assassins.^[6]^[15]

The infamous Assassins were finally linked by orientalist scholar Silvestre de Sacy (d.1838) to the Arabic *hashishi* using their variant names *assassini* and *assissini* in the 19th century. Citing the example of one of the first written applications of the Arabic term *hashishi* to the Ismailis by historian Abu Shams (d.1267), de Sacy demonstrated its connection to the name given to the Ismailis throughout Western scholarship.^[6]^[14] Ironically, the first known usage of the term *hashishi* has been traced back to 1122 AD when the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir employed it in derogatory reference to the Syrian Nizaris.^[6]^[12] Without accusing the group of utilizing the hashish drug, the caliph used the term in a pejorative manner. This label was quickly applied by anti-Ismaili historians to the Ismailis of Syria and Persia.^[1]^[12] Used figuratively, the term *hashishi* connotes the term's meaning such as outbreaks or rabble-rousing.^[6]^[12] The spread of the term was further facilitated through military encounters between the Nizaris and the Crusaders, whose chroniclers adopted the term and disseminated it across Europe.

The legends of the Assassins had much to do with the training and instruction of Nizari *fidai* 's, famed for their public missions during which they often gave their lives to eliminate adversaries. Misinformation from the Crusader accounts and the works of anti-Ismaili historians have contributed to the tales of *fidai* 's being fed with hashish as part of their training.^[2]^[22] Whether *fidai* 's were actually trained or dispatched by Nizari leaders is unconfirmed, but scholars including Wladimir Ivanov report that the assassination of key figures including Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk likely provided encouraging impetus to others in the community who sought to secure the Nizaris from political aggression.^[9]^[72] In fact, the Seljuqs and Crusaders both employed assassination as a military means of disposing of factional enemies. Yet during the Alamut period almost any murder of political significance in the Islamic lands became attributed to the Ismailis.^[6]^[129] So inflated had this association grown, that in the work of Orientalist scholars such as Bernard Lewis the Ismailis were virtually equated to the politically active *fidai* 's. Thus the Nizari Ismaili community was regarded as a radical and heretical sect known as the Assassins.^[12]^[12] Originally, a "local and popular term" first applied to the Ismailis of Syria, the label was orally transmitted to Western historians and thus found itself in their histories of the Nizaris.^[10]^[16]

The tales of the *fidai* 's' training collected from anti-Ismaili historians and orientalist writers were confounded and compiled in Marco Polo's account, in which he described a "secret garden of paradise".^[6]^[18] After being drugged, the Ismaili devotees were said to be taken to a paradise-like garden filled with attractive young maidens and beautiful plants in which these *fidai* 's would awaken. Here, they were told by an "old" man that they were witnessing their place in Paradise and that should they wish to return to this garden permanently, they must serve the Nizari cause.^[6]^[18] So went the tale of the "Old Man in the Mountain", assembled by Marco Polo and accepted by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), a prominent orientalist writer responsible for much of the spread of this legend. Until the 1930s, von Hammer's retelling of the Assassin legends served as the standard account of the Nizaris across Europe.^[6]^[16]

Modern works on the Nizaris have elucidated the history of the Nizaris and in doing so, dispelled popular histories from the past as legends. In 1933, under the direction of the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III (1877–1957), the Islamic Research Association was developed. Prominent historian Wladimir Ivanov, was central to both this institution and the 1946 Ismaili Society of Bombay. Cataloguing a number of Ismaili texts, Ivanov provided the ground for great strides in modern Ismaili scholarship.^[6]^[17]

In recent years, the archaeologist Peter Willey has provided interesting evidence against the folkloric Assassin histories of earlier scholars. Drawing on its established esoteric doctrine, Willey asserts that the Ismaili understanding of Paradise is a deeply symbolic one. While the Qur'anic description of Heaven includes natural

imagery, Willey argues that no Zairi would seriously believe that he was witnessing Paradise simply by awakening in a beautiful garden.¹¹⁵⁵ The Nizari's symbolic interpretation of the Qur'anic description of Paradise serves as evidence against the possibility of such an exotic garden used as motivation for the devotees to carry out their armed missions. Furthermore, Willey points out that Jaywani the courier of the Great Mongol, surveyed the Alamut castle just before the Mongol invasion. In his reports about the fortress, there are elaborate descriptions of sophisticated storage facilities and the famous Alamut library. However, even this anti-Islamic historian makes no mention of the folkloric grounds on the Alamut grounds.¹¹⁵⁶ Having destroyed a number of texts of the library's collection, deemed by Willey to be heretical, it would be expected that he would pay significant attention to the Nizari gardens, particularly if they were the site of drug use and temptation. Jaywani not having once mentioned such gardens, Willey concludes that there is no sound evidence in favour of these fictitious legends. A reference collection of material excavated at Alamut Castle by Willey is in the British Museum.¹¹⁵⁷

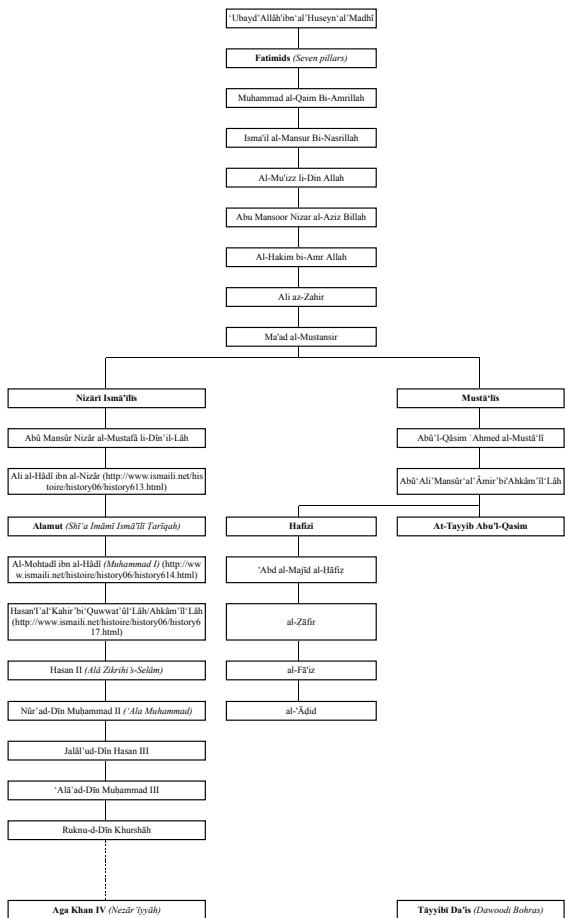
In popular culture

- Slovenian novelist Vladimir Bartol novel *Alamut* (1938) reminded *The Tale of the Assassin legends* and stands as a canonical work of Slovene literature.
- Bartol's novel has been translated into most major literary languages.^[14]
- Judith Lurie wrote a series of novels centered on Alamut
- In his story "The Walking Dervish," Louis J'Amour uses Alamut as the setting for the rescue of Keruboschah's father.
- Alamut and Hassan-i-Sabbah are described vividly in William S. Burroughs' *The Western Lands*.
- A fictional depiction of Alamut cast in the middle of the 13th century and its fall in 1256 is featured in *The Children of the Gnuil* books series by Peter Berling.
- In Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, Alamut is described in detail towards the end of the novel.
- A fictional depiction of the final Fall of the Alamut citadel is depicted in the book *Bowels of the Hills*, from the Conqueror series written by Tom Hodgkinson. In the role-playing game, *Iron Kingdoms: The Dark Ages*, Alamut is the chief antagonist.
- Alamut is an art-house fragrance by Lorento Villoresi, one of his many inspired by Middle Eastern locations and stories.
- Alamut is an art-city of Princess Tamina (Gemma Arterton) and the location of the Sands of Time in the 2010 movie *Princess of Persia: The Sands of Time*.
- Alamut is the title and subject of a short story "Harold Lamont featuring the character Kaitir the Coward" published in *Adventure* magazine in 1918.
- On the occasion of His Highness Aga Khan's Golden Jubilee in 2007, Alamut International Theatre Company presented *Ain to Karim (Aziz)*; *A Tribute to the Ismaili Imams Directed by Hafiz Kamari*.
- Assad, the protagonist in Scott Oden's 2010 novel *The Lion's Creed*, is an assassin from Alamut.
- In the multiplatform computer game *Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars*, Chloé Adams is a deadly hacker who can visit and meet people.
- The template is mentioned in the video game series *Assassin's Creed* and the novel's Assassin's Creed. The Secret Bay Crusade and Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, where the fortress is unknowingly built at a First Civilization Temple. The Assassin Mentor Altair Ibn-La'Ahad discovered there in exile for two decades since 1228.
- After his wife died, he lived in the Alamut Temple until he found it was his Mayday Memorial dedicated to contain memories, therefore, he took five for the Mayday library and one for his final moments, also discovering new inventions. In the novelization of Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag (which contains more details of Edward Kenway's later life and apparent murder) Edward Kenway abandoned his former rituals and founded a British Master Assassin (eventually turned to the Holy Lands in search of First Civilization sites, later finding Alamut fortresses in ruins and exploiting it).

See also

- Alamut (region)
- Hassan-i Sabbah
- Lambar Castle
- List of Ismaili castles
- Iranian architecture
- (Turkish) Muhammad bin Kiya Buazurg Ummid
- (Turkish) El-Hādī bin el-Nizār
- (Turkish) El-Mōtāhid bin el-Hādī
- (Turkish) El-Kābir bin el-Mōtāhid bi-Kuwent'āl-Lāh / bi-Ahkām'ī-Lāh
- (Turkish) Imām Hassan 'ala dhikrūhi al-salam
- (Turkish) Kiyāmāt-e Kūbrā
- (Turkish) Nūr al-dīn Muḥammad II
- (Turkish) Cella'd ed-Dīn Husayn III
- (Turkish) 'Alā' ad-Dīn Muḥammad III
- (Turkish) Rūkn ed-Dīn Hūr-Şāh

Family tree

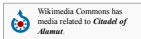


References

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External links

- HASAN BIN SABBAAH AND NIZARI ISMAILI STATE IN ALAMUT (<http://www.ismaili.net/histoire/history06/history601.html>)
- Kiya Buzrug Ummid (<http://www.ismaili.net/histoire/history06/history612.html>)



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